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Weasels and Their Control

Weasels are small, short-legged, slender predatory animals with long furred tails, dark at the tip. The upper parts of these animals are yellowish to dark brown; underparts, white with yellow tint. Winter pelage of northern forms is usually white except for black tip on tail. Possessing scent glands, weasels belong to the family Mustelidae along with martens, minks, otters, skunks, badgers, and wolverines. Although scarce in numbers, the animals are quite universally distributed, and five different species belonging to the genus Mustela are found in North America. The white coat of northern forms is a valuable fur known as ermine, and some states therefore permit trapping of the animals in winter only.

These small predators are fearless fighters and do not hesitate to attack victims many times larger than themselves. Their principal food consists of rodents and birds. At times they raid poultry houses at night and cause severe losses to domestic fowl by feeding upon the warm blood of victims bitten in the head or neck. They often kill for sheer pleasure and neatly place the dead birds in a single pile. Such predation by rats usually differs in that portions of the body may be eaten and carcasses dragged into holes or concealed locations.

Weasels have a curious nature and are rather easily trapped in No. 0 or No. 1 steel traps. Professional trappers in thickly settled areas use an inverted wooden box a foot or two long, such as an apple box, with a 2- or 3-inch square opening cut out in the lower part of one end, as a protected trap location. Bait is suspended against the end of the box opposite the opening and a trap is set directly under the bait.

Trap sets in old brush piles, under outbuildings, under fences, and along stone walls are also suggested, since the weasel is likely to investigate any small covered area. Baits consisting of fresh rabbit, bloody chicken heads, entrails, etc., may be suspended 8 or 10 inches above the trap. In such instances, the trap set should be covered by objects such as boards or tree limbs to protect other forms of wildlife.

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